

## Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

### 'Apocalypse' in Sudan?

*The country which could have been Africa's "breadbasket," becomes an inferno due to IMF and World Bank policies.*

**D**etails of the devastation caused by two days of torrential rain in Sudan during the weekend of Aug. 6-7 are now beginning to emerge. Phone and telex lines to the capital Khartoum had been cut, and electricity supplies interrupted.

One and a half million people are reported to have been made homeless by floods caused by the overflow of the two Niles, the White Nile and the Blue Nile, which meet at Khartoum.

There is no drinking water in the capital, no food supplies, the electricity supply is still only 15% of normal, and roads are still awash. The plight of the 1 million refugees camped on the outskirts of the city, and totally dependent on food aid, can only be guessed at—their camps are now inaccessible.

No one knows how many people have died, although one foreign aid worker reported that 30 Sudanese working for the aid organizations had been killed, giving an indication of a very high death toll. There is an immediate threat of epidemics of cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and hepatitis.

The Sudanese ambassador in Kenya described the floods as "one of the most terrible disasters ever to affect our country," and called for urgent international aid, including helicopters, to transport emergency aid to areas cut off by the floods.

In eastern Sudan, there are reports of similar devastation in the towns of Kassala, Gedaref, where there are 700,000 Ethiopian refugees, and Atara. But due to the breakdown in communication, the extent of damage is not yet clear.

Worse is still to come: The level

of the Nile has risen to a point where the two dams on the Blue Nile will have to be opened, sending yet more water down into Khartoum.

At the beginning of August, Sudan had appealed for international aid to fight the 30 swarms of locusts which are ravaging crops: They are consuming 300,000 tons of food per day. The torrential rain will encourage their proliferation.

Are these "natural disasters" which from time to time inevitably afflict long-suffering nations? Far from it. While the rain which fell was exceptionally heavy, 9 inches in 15 hours—twice as much as in any whole year for 30 years—the devastation caused could have been much reduced by efficient water management schemes, and by modern infrastructure.

The fact is that Sudan—a country the size of Western Europe, with only 24 million inhabitants—has been the victim of the malthusian policy of international financial institutions and organizations.

Only 20 years ago, there were exciting plans to make Sudan the "breadbasket of the Arab world," due to its tremendous agricultural potential. Sudan has 40% of the potentially arable land in the Arab world.

Projects were considered to double grain production, raise meat output by 140%, and increase sugar production to provide a large proportion of the imported food requirements of the Middle East. What happened to those plans?

Most cultivation is concentrated in the area between the White and Blue Niles. The greatest irrigation project in the world is the Gezira ("Island")

between the two rivers, where cotton, Sudan's main export commodity, is produced.

In the 1960s and 1970s, other major irrigation schemes were begun, to extend the area of arable land. The most important was the Jonglei canal project, a 175-mile canal which would have bypassed part of the Nile that winds through the Sudd, where huge quantities of water evaporate.

The Jonglei canal was called the "project of the century," and has been under study since 1904. Up to 6 billion cubic meters of water per annum would have been provided by the scheme, as well as reclamation of 3.7 million acres of land.

A road alongside the canal would have reduced the distance between Juba, the largest city of the south, and the north, and would have helped bridge the gap between the two parts of the country (the "Arab" north, and the "African" south).

However, the building of the canal, and all other major infrastructure projects have been abandoned.

In 1978, Sudan went to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help, due to economic problems caused by falling exports of cotton. One of the conditions for International Monetary Fund help was—stop all large-scale projects. The IMF in particular ordered Sudan to forget "diversification," i.e., production of food, and concentrate on increasing cotton production.

At the same time, the World Wildlife Fund and the German organization called the Society for Endangered Peoples, violently criticized the plans for the Jonglei canal, claiming that the swamp it would dry out was ecologically important!

In 1983, rebels in the south attacked the canal, and all work was stopped in December 1983.